

---

[Databases selected:](#) ProQuest Newsstand, Argus Leader, St. Cloud Times

## Drug-testing effectiveness questioned

*Mitch LeClair. St. Cloud Times. St. Cloud, Minn.: Mar 27, 2011. pg. A.1*

### Abstract (Summary)

Mary Bongers, assistant director of human resources at St. Cloud State University, said the school conducts pre-employment and postaccident screens on employees with commercial driver's licenses -- a requirement by the state of Minnesota.

### Full Text (852 words)

*Copyright 2011 - St. Cloud Times MN - All Rights Reserved*

Special to the Times

Along with relevant work history and references, many area employers require job hunters to submit a most-personal piece of their past -- their urine.

Work-related drug testing has increased in prevalence for nearly 25 years, with construction, manufacturing and even retail companies peering into the information drawn from samples.

Chuck Gorres, who works in human resources at Cold Spring Granite Co., said his 900-person company conducts random and "reasonable suspicion" drug screens.

"We want to make sure that we don't have people here that are under the influence," he said.

The owner of Mid Minnesota Drug Testing in Little Falls, Gerri Burtych, said a variety of area employers request standard five-panel drug screens -- which detect marijuana, cocaine, PCP, opiates and amphetamines -- to make sure they have "clean employees."

Whether drug use causes or correlates with workplace injuries, however, is still a matter of dispute.

In a 2009 paper published by the RAND Institute, researchers concluded that "an association between substance use and occupational injury" does exist.

"The proportion of injuries caused by substance use, however, is relatively small," they argued, saying that people who engage in risky behavior with their bodies are simply more likely to behave recklessly at work.

Mary Bongers, assistant director of human resources at St. Cloud State University, said the school conducts pre-employment and postaccident screens on employees with commercial driver's licenses -- a requirement by the state of Minnesota.

She said all faculty members and most staff at St. Cloud State University are not subject to pre-employment or any ongoing testing.

Bongers compared the effectiveness of drug testing to driver's license reviews she conducted while working for the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

A driving infraction committed after a positive license review might not show up until months later, she said. In a similar way, employees could use drugs immediately after passing a drug screen.

State law since 1987

Current state law hasn't varied much since 1987, when Minnesota became one of five states that first implemented pre-employment drug testing laws.

Employers can't fire a current employee or withdraw an offer to an applicant because of a failed drug screen without allowing that person to verify results with an additional test.

The law also prohibits the state from using positive test results against an employee or applicant in criminal proceedings.

Some employers view drug test laws for commercial drivers as costly and invasive government action.

Recent scholarly research has questioned the costs and benefits of drug tests.

In her 2010 dissertation at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Miranda Kitterlin reported the results of her look at 110 full-service restaurants and their policies.

She found that "the use of a pre-employment drug test does not significantly reduce the rates of employee absenteeism, turnover and accidents/injuries."

In a 2009 paper published by the World Health Organization, the University of Connecticut's Joseph Pachman suggested the elimination of pre-employment drug tests.

"There is insufficient evidence to suggest that this process is cost-effective," he said, adding that tests are likely an "expensive and redundant alternative" to looking at an applicant's work history when evaluating overall job fitness.

Timing is issue

Effective or not, drug tests' inherent timing limitations may be punishing self-medicators and preventing hard-drug use for only a day or two, according to Don Glatzmaier, the owner of Sobriety First, an addiction treatment and support office in St. Cloud.

He said one of his clients recently smoked crack cocaine shortly before her parole officer administered a urinalysis.

Had the screen happened a few days later, she would have tested negative for the substance, Glatzmaier said, as urine tests can detect cocaine-based substances for only two to four days after ingestion.

Nearly all drugs leave a person's system after only a day or two, including methamphetamine, heroin and ecstasy.

Others, such as PCP and some prescription drugs like Xanax, are sometimes detectable for weeks after a person ingests the substances.

The drug that lingers the longest binds to fat cells and is one that Glatzmaier thought can be a legitimate help for some people: marijuana.

He said a man came into his office for eight hours of chemical dependency classes recently after a forklift accident at his job. A drug screen found tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive substance in marijuana.

Glatzmaier said the client used marijuana for pain and anxiety management, and now the owner of the treatment facility is checking to see if any area doctors will prescribe medication derived from cannabis to the reprimanded warehouse worker.

Screening process

While employers and testing facilities disagree on the validity of tests, some employers are simply going along with it.

Todd Canfield, an assistant manager at Target in Crossroads Center, said his retail store conducts pre-employment drug tests on every applicant after making a job offer.

"We don't do any testing of any kind after employment," he said.

As for preventing current employees from using their drug of choice, Canfield said he wasn't sure the pre-employment testing policy was effective.

"Whether or not it's a deterrent, I don't know," he said. "It's just part of the screening process."

### **Indexing (document details)**

**Subjects:** Drug testing, Colleges & universities, Cocaine, Prescription drugs, Injuries, Employment, Employees

**Author(s):** Mitch LeClair

**Document types:** News

**Section:** *World/Nation*

**Publication title:** St. Cloud Times. St. Cloud, Minn.: Mar 27, 2011. pg. A.1

**Source type:** Newspaper

**ISSN:** 08995028

**ProQuest document ID:** 2313101041

**Text Word Count** 852

**Document URL:** <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2313101041&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=47943&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

---

Copyright © 2011 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

